**REMARKS**

The Office Action dated December 8, 2003 has been received and carefully noted. The above amendments and following remarks are submitted as a full and complete response thereto. By this amendment, claim 17 has merely been amended to correct a typographical error. No new matter has been added nor amendments made that narrow the scope of any element of any claim. Currently, claims 25-30, 49 and 50 have been withdrawn from consideration. Accordingly, claims 1-24, 31-48 and 51-55 are pending in this application and are submitted for consideration.

Claims 1-8 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Weinreich et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,175,831 B1, "Weinreich"). However, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 1-8 recite subject matter that is neither disclosed nor suggested in Weinreich.

Claim 1 recites a method of providing a multi-level hierarchical communications network including the steps of: accessing a network central database; creating a networking data set by entering information relating to multiple entities; assigning specific access rights of varying levels to each entity; storing the information at the database; searching the networking data set to identify entities satisfying a specific criteria; and verifying the access rights assigned to the entities found in the search result.

In making this rejection, the Office Action took the position that Weinreich discloses all of the elements of the claimed invention. However, it is respectfully submitted that the prior art fails to disclose or suggest the structure of the claimed invention, and therefore, fails to provide the advantages of the present invention. For

example, the multi-level hierarchical communications network of the present invention is configured to assign specific access rights of varying levels to multiple entities and verify the access rights assigned to the entities found in a search that satisfy specific criteria.

As a result of the claimed configuration, the present invention optimizes an individual's networking capabilities by providing a secured system for organizing and processing information in a database.

In the present invention, access to personal user information is defined by the level of access. The individual user can customize the extent of personal information that he makes available to each individual in his personal network. Thus, for example, a close personal friend could have access to more personal information in the user's profile, as opposed to a colleague who may only be given access to the user's professional information. Therefore, as an additional benefit of the present invention, this feature ensures that an individual can control the extent of personal information that he shares with each individual in his personal network and with the overall system.

Further, access to an individual's network is also defined by the level of access that the individual grants to each of his contacts. The individual user can customize and organize his personal network and authorize only a subset of his personal contacts to access his personal and extended network. This helps an individual optimally manage his network and minimize the chances of being spammed without missing out on the opportunities available in such connected communities. For example, an influential person is sure to have a large network of contacts. Currently, , without the privacy and security features provided by the present invention, his information would be accessible

to the entire population of users connected to him, thereby making the system a threat to his privacy. But, by using the present invention, he can define a list of people that he trusts through whom he would be available to be contacted thereby making it valuable and feasible for him to belong to this network.

Therefore, although many people may be a part of a user's networking data set, the user's extended network is accessible to only those whom he assigns specific access rights.

Contrary to this, as discussed in the "Background of the Invention" section of the present application, Weinreich merely discloses a system whereby a networking database contains a plurality of records for different individuals that are connected to one another in the database by a defined relationship. Each individual defines their relationship with other individuals in the database. E-mail messaging and interactive communication is utilized to establish the relationship between individuals. However, the problem with this technology is that it does not provide adequate privacy protection from undesired outside solicitations.

For example, as the community grows, every individual is connected to many more individuals. Although this increases the number of people to whom each individual is connected, it also increases the chances of undesired outside solicitations. By not having privacy and security features, an individual has no control over his 'availability' on the network.

The present invention allows every user in the network to define the extent to which he wishes to be 'available' on the network and also allows each user to define the

extent to which his personal information and contacts are shared with each individual on his personal network.

In, the present invention, a user assigns specific access rights of varying levels to each entity that is part of a networking data set, as recited in claim 1. Further, in the present invention, access rights convey or deny access to further database searching and the access rights comprise at least two different security levels, as recited in claims 2 and 3. Still further, in the present invention, different security levels are associated with unique information relating to each entity, as recited in claim 4. Even further, in the present invention, the search result contains information relating to entities assigned a specific level of access rights, as recited in claim 7.

The Office Action took the position that col. 2, lines 10 – col. 4, line 37 discloses the claimed steps of the present invention. However, upon review of these sections, Applicants are unable to find any such disclosure.

Therefore, Weinreich fails to disclose or suggest the claimed invention and it is respectfully submitted that the Applicants' invention, as set forth in claims 1, is not anticipated within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 102.

As claims 2-8 depend directly or indirectly from claim 1, Applicants respectfully submit that each of these claims incorporate the patentable aspects thereof, and are therefore allowable for at least same reasons as discussed above.

Claims 9-13 were also rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Weinreich et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,175,831 B1, "Weinreich"). However, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 9-13 recite subject matter that is neither disclosed nor suggested in Weinreich.

Claim 9 recites a method of providing a networking database including the steps of: connecting to a central database; storing multiple user profiles at the central database; assigning user access rights to each user profile; searching network search fields associated with each user profile for specific criteria; receiving information regarding user profiles related to the specific search criteria; and performing a subsequent network search by searching the information received to determine additional user profiles.

The Office Action again took the position that col. 2, lines 10 – col. 4, line 37 of Weinreich discloses the claimed steps of the present invention. However, upon review of these sections, Applicants are unable to find any such disclosure. Weinreich merely discloses that a first user sponsors a second user, in turn the second user sponsors a third user, and so on. Therefore, Weinreich fails to at least disclose or suggest the steps of assigning user rights to multiple user profiles, searching network search fields associated with each user profile for specific criteria, or performing a subsequent network search by searching information received to determine additional user profiles, as recited in claim 9.

Weinreich also fails to disclose or suggest assigning access rights of at least two different security levels of that the different security levels are associated with unique information relating to the specific criteria, as recited in claims 10 and 11.

Thus, it is respectfully submitted that the Applicants' invention, as set forth in claim 9, is not anticipated within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 102.

As claims 10-13 depend directly or indirectly from claim 9, Applicants respectfully submit that each of these claims incorporate the patentable aspects thereof, and are therefore allowable for at least same reasons as discussed above.

Claims 14-24 were also rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Weinreich et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,175,831 B1, "Weinreich"). However, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 14-24 recite subject matter that is neither disclosed nor suggested in Weinreich.

Claim 14 recites a method of searching a network database including the steps of: (a) storing information relating to a first entity in a first network database; (b) storing information relating to a second entity in a second network database; (c) assigning access rights to the information relating to each entity in the first and second network databases; (d) searching the first network database for specific data relating to the first entity; (e) searching the second network database for the specific data requirement if the search of the first network database does not find criteria matching the specific data requirement; (f) associating a multibridge linking code with the second entity if the entity has criteria matching the specific data requirement from the second search; (g) retrieving the specific data by using the multibridge linking code; and (h) establishing contact with the entity.

The present invention also provides that even after a chain of links is identified in a search, a user will not have access to information of the other individuals that form the links in the network and will not be able to network with them unless the user utilizes the link-by-link approach. Thus ensuring that individual privacy and the privacy of each individual forming the network is maintained.

The Office Action took the position that col. 2, line 10 – col. 4, line 37, and col. 7, lines 55-65 of Weinreich discloses the claimed steps of the present invention. However, upon review of these sections, Applicants are unable to find any such disclosure. Additionally, it appears that col. 7, lines 55-65 merely discloses that an e-mail address and network access password is assigned to each individual. Thus, contrary to the present invention, the network access discussed in Weinreich refers to the username/password, not the network access of the claimed invention.

Therefore, Weinreich fails to at least disclose or suggest the steps of assigning access rights to the information relating to each entity in the first and second network databases; searching the first network database for specific data relating to the first entity; searching the second network database for the specific data requirement if the search of the first network database does not find criteria matching the specific data requirement; associating a multibridge linking code with the second entity if the entity has criteria matching the specific data requirement from the second search; and retrieving the specific data by using the multibridge linking code, as recited in claim 14.

Weinreich also fails to disclose or suggest wherein the multibridge linking code grants the privilege to access further information relating to each entity in the second group, as recited in claim 15, or wherein the multibridge linking codes are time-bound codes, as recited in claim 16, or wherein the multibridge linking codes are alphanumeric, symbols or icons, as recited in claim 17, or wherein the multibridge linking codes are randomly assigned, as recited in claim 18.

Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that the Applicants' Invention, as set forth in claim 14 is not anticipated within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 102.

As claims 15-24 depend directly or indirectly from claim 14, Applicants respectfully submit that each of these claims incorporate the patentable aspects thereof, and are therefore allowable for at least same reasons as discussed above.

Claims 31-38 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Weinreich et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,175,831 B1, "Weinreich"). However, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 31-48 recite subject matter that is neither disclosed nor suggested in Weinreich.

Claim 31 discloses a network database system including means for storing information relating to a first entity in a first network central database and means for storing information relating to a second entity in a second network central database. Means are provided for assigning access rights to the information relating to each entity in the first and second network databases. Means are provided for searching the first network database for the specific data relating to the first entity. Means are provided for searching the second network database for the specific data requirement if the search of the first network does not find criteria matching the specific data requirement. Means are provided for associating a multibridge linking code with each individual in the second group. Means are provided for retrieving the specific data by using the multibridge linking code.

Claim 36 recites a system for providing a networking database including means for connecting to a central database and means for storing multiple user profiles at the central database. Means are provided for assigning user access rights to each user profile. Means are provided for searching network search fields associated with each user profile for specific criteria. Means are provided for receiving information regarding

user profiles related to the specific search criteria. Means are provided for performing a subsequent network search by searching the information received to determine additional user profiles.

Claim 41 recites a communications network including means for accessing a network central database and means for creating a networking data set by entering information relating to multiple entities. Means are provided for assigning specific access rights of varying levels to each entity. Means are provided for storing the information at the database. Means are provided for searching the networking data set to identify entities satisfying a specific criteria. Means are provided for verifying the access rights assigned to the entities found in the search result.

As discussed above, Weinreich fails to disclose or suggest the claimed invention. Furthermore, claims 31, 36 and 41-48 are written in means-plus-function language. According to MPEP § 2183, in reviewing means-plus-function claims, not only is it required to be shown that the structure is disclosed or suggested by the prior art, it has to be shown that the prior art structure is performing the same function. Since there is no teaching or suggestion of the claimed functions, there can be no anticipation of the claimed elements.

Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that the Applicants' invention, as set forth in claims 31, 36 and 41, is not anticipated within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 102.

As claims 32-95 depend directly or indirectly from claim 31, claims 37-40 depend from claim 36, and claims 42-48 depend from claim 41, Applicants respectfully submit that each of these claims incorporate the patentable aspects thereof, and are therefore allowable for at least same reasons as discussed above.

Claims 51-55 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Weinreich et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,175,831 B1, "Weinreich"). However, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 51-55 recite subject matter that is neither disclosed nor suggested in Weinreich.

Claim 51 recites a method of optimizing networking capability including the steps of: providing a networking database comprised of information relating to multiple entities; searching the networking database for specific data relating to the entities; assigning a multibridge linking code to each entity found during the search that has criteria matching the specific data requirement; creating a hierarchical chain between each entity found during the search; assigning a key to represent all the multibridge linking codes that have been assigned during the search; configuring the key to be passed between each entity in the hierarchical chain; using the key to contact the first entity in the hierarchical chain found during the search; using the key to contact the next entity in the hierarchical chain found during the search; wherein each entity in the hierarchical chain decides whether to forward the key to the subsequent entity in the hierarchical chain.

In making this rejection, the Office Action again took the position that col. 2, line 10 – col. 4, line 37, and col. 7, lines 55-65 of Weinreich discloses the claimed steps of the present invention. However, as discussed above, Weinreich fails to disclose or suggest the claimed invention.

Another benefit of the present invention is that the hierarchical chain comprising of the people that create a connection between two individuals and the process of establishing the connection using the link-by-link key forwarding system ensures that

individual privacy and security is maintained even through the process of networking. For example, if a user forming the link does not wish to allow the networking he need not forward the key thereby stopping the networking from taking place. Further, any individual forming an intermediary link is ensured that his personal information is not revealed to anyone other than his immediate contacts thus protecting his privacy with the other links in the network.

Therefore, Weinreich fails to at least disclose or suggest the steps of assigning a multibridge linking code to each entity found during the search that has criteria matching the specific data requirement; creating a hierarchical chain between each entity found during the search; assigning a key to represent all the multibridge linking codes that have been assigned during the search; configuring the key to be passed between each entity in the hierarchical chain; using the key to contact the first entity in the hierarchical chain found during the search; using the key to contact the next entity in the hierarchical chain found during the search; wherein each entity in the hierarchical chain decides whether to forward the key to the subsequent entity in the hierarchical chain, as recited in claim 51.

Weinreich also fails to disclose or suggest wherein each entity in the hierarchical chain conveys or denies access to their information by not using the key to contact a subsequent entity, as recited in claim 52, wherein the key is configured to be time-bound, as recited in claim 53 or wherein the key is randomly assigned, as recited in claim 55.

Thus, it is respectfully submitted that the Applicants' invention, as set forth in claims 51-55, is not anticipated within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 102.

As claims 52-55 depend directly or indirectly from claim 51, Applicants respectfully submit that each of these claims incorporate the patentable aspects thereof, and are therefore allowable for at least same reasons as discussed above.

In view of the foregoing, reconsideration of the application, withdrawal of the outstanding rejections, allowance of claims 1-24, 31-48 and 51-55, and the prompt issuance of a Notice of Allowability are respectfully solicited.

If this application is not in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone listed below.

In the event this paper is not considered to be timely filed, the Applicants respectfully petition for an appropriate extension of time. Any fees for such an extension, together with any additional fees that may be due with respect to this paper, may be charged to counsel's Deposit Account No. 01-2300, **referencing docket number 024430-00001.**

Respectfully submitted,
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